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HALL WARNS THAT INDONESIANS ARE 'STAGE-MANAGING' POPE'S VISIT TO EAST TIMOR

WASHINGTON—Rep. Tony P. Hall warned that the Indonesian government is "stage-managing" the visit of Pope John Paul II to East Timor in an effort to cover up the record of human rights abuses in that predominantly Roman Catholic former Portuguese colony. The Pope will be visiting the territory during his trip to Asia from October 6 to 12.

Amnesty International, the United Nations Subcommission on Human Rights, the European Parliament, and authoritative church sources have called attention to the continuing and severe violations of human rights in East Timor.

It is generally accepted that at least 100,000 persons out of an original population of less than 700,000 have perished in East Timor as a consequence of Indonesia's 1975 invasion and subsequent occupation of the territory.

Hall, a longtime leader of the Congressional effort on the issue, noted that interest among members of the U.S. Congress in the East Timor tragedy remains very strong.

In late 1988 nearly half of the members of the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate signed a letter to then-U.S. Secretary of State George P. Shultz expressing concern about human rights abuses and calling for an equitable settlement of the long conflict in East Timor.

More recently, 118 members of the House of Representatives signed a letter to President Bush raising similar concerns on the occasion of Indonesian President Suharto's June 1989 visit to Washington.

In a recent interview with a leading Portuguese weekly, Roman Catholic Bishop of East Timor Carlos Ximenes Belo described the atmosphere in East Timor before Pope John Paul's visit as "an environment of terror [amidst Indonesian efforts to bring about] the elimination of 'undesirables.' " Bishop Belo also said that the Indonesian government plans to send 50,000 Indonesians to East Timor to the site where Pope John Paul II will celebrate Mass.

Hall and others fear that the Indonesians brought in for the occasion of the Papal visit would serve as a human wall to stand between the Holy Father and the people of East Timor, preventing their true grievances from being heard.

"Pope John Paul II should be allowed to talk to ordinary East Timorese people in settings where they would not suffer recrimination," Hall said.

"It appears that the Indonesian government is stage-managing the Papal visit to East Timor like a Hollywood film epic with a cast of thousands. The world should not be deceived by Indonesia's orchestration of this event," Hall added.

It has been widely reported that the Indonesian government has been planning the Papal visit instead of the local Church. Hall and other experts see the Indonesian orchestration of the visit as designed to present a peaceful facade and to obscure the suffering of the East Timor people.

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